



A background image showing a man and a woman in business attire flying through the air against a blue sky with clouds. The man is holding a large American flag. The woman is also flying, looking towards the camera.

THE HIGH FLYING Leadership Qualities: What Matters the Most?

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Like many U.S. companies, the Department of Defense (DoD) invests in leadership development. The DoD recognizes equal benefits and has instituted various programs to enable it. However, not every DoD organization invests in leadership development the same way. The ones that do think more deeply about their future have thoughtful and effective leadership development programs that combine training, practice, and cultivation—all intended to professionally nurture future leaders. DoD organizations that have more defined hierarchical leadership structures such as mid-level managers (MLMs), senior-level managers (SLMs), senior-level leaders (SLLs), or equivalent offer a gateway to learn more about what leadership qualities matter to them. At the Defense Acquisition University, 37 MLMs, and 32 SLMs provided valuable insights in their survey responses. No SLLs participated in this study.

Keywords: *leadership qualities, DoD, DAU, senior- and mid-level managers, strategic planning*

If institutions like DAU treat learning as a lifetime pursuit, then what do its mid-level managers (MLMs) and senior-level managers (SLMs) have to say about the leadership qualities that matter most during their own continuing professional development journey? Aside from growing more capable leaders along with the ability to create greater influence inside and outside their learning spheres, are there any leadership quality outliers in particular that deserve a more intensive review based on responses from a representative sample population? The DAU workforce is in a powerful position to address this question given the inherent diversity and capability among its ranks, as well as the previous operational and functional background of its personnel steeped in both DoD and industry experience.

Research Methodology

Based on their experiences, survey respondents were asked to identify the five leadership qualities that mattered most to them, from a list of 14 representative ones drawn from multiple sources. The respondents had to make hard choices. What specific factors influenced their leadership quotient and why? Did their position, generational affiliation, supervisory experience, and number of years in their current position at DAU create any noticeable flux? What about the qualities that fell outside their top five? Were they still important, and to what degree? The remainder of this article addresses answers to these questions in aggregate, as well as in the context of various demographic slices among both MLMs and SLMs to understand better the causes, and whether or not there is a cause for concern for other institutions similar to DAU throughout the DoD. The more granular results are reported through frequency tables and augmented by qualitative comments.

The order of the 14 leadership qualities (Table 1) in this particular survey was intentionally randomized.

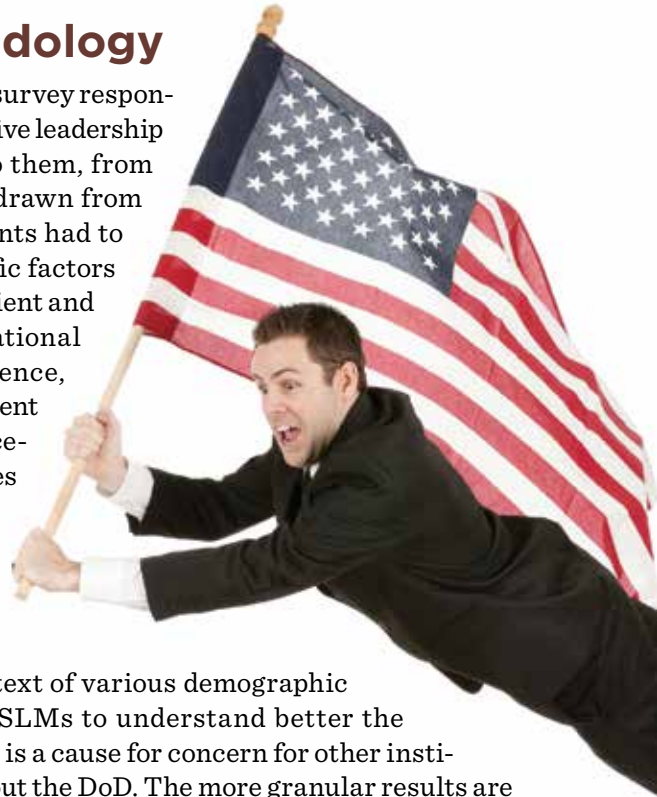


TABLE 1. 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Leads by Example	Develops Self & Others
Effective Communicator	Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships
Competent	Credible
Displays Respect & Support for Others	Behavior Aligns with DAU Values
Critical Thinking	Exercises Authority & Decision Making
Promotes Collaboration	Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective
Change Agent	Innovator

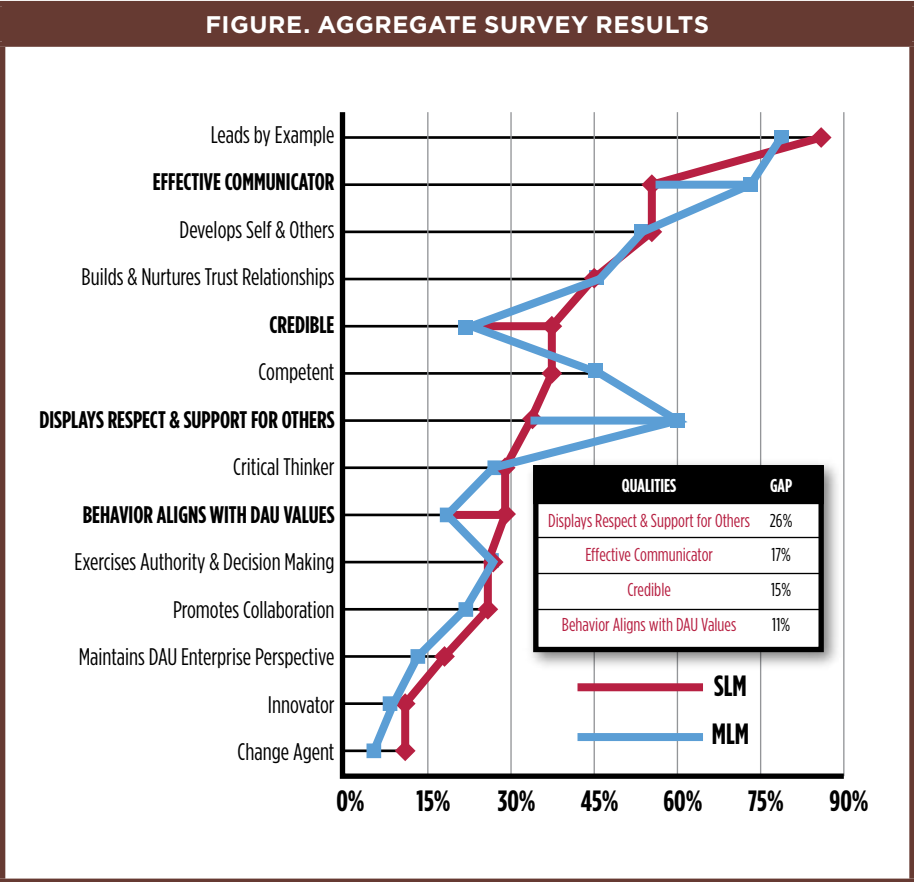
Results and Findings (Aggregate)

The Figure displays Aggregate Survey Results. Among all the respondents, **Leads by Example** and **Effective Communicator** rose as the top two choices. Research underscores similar findings. Both characteristics seem to embody the importance of the expected qualities found “in” and “of” leaders; they also tend to be inextricably linked in practice. RBC Financial Group, Canada’s largest financial corporation, recognized the value and combined the two by instituting a communication process called “Leadership Dialogues” where “established leaders relate their career experiences to developing leaders” (Beslin & Reddin, 2004). As part of Effective Communicator, listening is also an especially important component. Listening takes time and generally requires us to think more about our thinking (i.e., metacognition). Without it, decision missteps can potentially result. In their book, *Leadership by Example: The Ten Key Principles of All Great Leaders*, Dr. Sanjiv Chopra and David Fisher remind us that as

Abraham Lincoln said, “It is better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak up and dispel all doubt” (Chopra & Fisher, 2012) by speaking up too soon. Surprisingly, research shows the average person listens at around 25 percent efficiency levels (Husman, Lahiff, & Penrose, 1988), even though listening is so closely tied to effective leadership (Johnson & Bechler, 1998). An ample supply of programs teaches us to be better communicators; few programs exist that teach us to be



better listeners (Janusik, Fullenkamp, & Partese, n.d.) or the important role that culture plays in communication through the motivation, knowledge, and skills of the interactants involved (Spitzberg, 1994).



For **Develops Self and Others**, instruments like an organization’s Strategic Plan (SP) or other similar means generally characterize some aspect of its leadership development programs as part of its mission heading. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2014) addresses leadership development in its SP under Goal 6: Strengthen Service Delivery and Manage DHS Resources, with a specific objective that focuses on “building an effective, mission-focused, diverse, and inspiring cadre of leaders” (p. 45). Whatever the manifestation, these programs can also pay huge dividends by lowering costly turnover rates, growing more capable leaders, and creating greater opportunities for professional gains as well as concomitant organizational successes inside and outside their domains.

In the respondents' selection of their top five, the author discerned a noticeable variance between how DAU SLMs and MLMs viewed Effective Communication, **Credible**, and **Displays Respect for Others**. MLMs more often selected Effective Communication and Displays Respect for Others in their top five, and provided quite a few supporting comments to reinforce their importance:

Effective Communication: "A leader must be able to communicate vision/purpose to the organization for it to understand goals and why they are important to the mission Basis for leadership Can't lead if you can't communicate It's not WHAT you say, but HOW you say it Effective leaders must be able to share knowledge and ideas as well as transmit urgency and enthusiasm to others."

Displays Respect for Others (Critical for a Leader): "Treat others the way you would expect to be treated A leader needs to respect not only the people that work for them, but also everyone in the enterprise; otherwise, trust breaks down A successful organization demonstrates respect for all levels of the organization Without respect, others will not listen or follow. An effective leader must be willing to consider others' opinions and be open to feedback, even if it's not favorable."

SLMs placed a greater emphasis than MLMs on Credible. For some MLMs, Credible may have dropped out of their top five based on their supporting comments (found under Leads by Example and Competent) where they responded:

Credible: "Basis of credibility ... A subordinate should only have to look one place for the standard that needs to be met—the supervisor Do as I do works much better than do as I say Time honored leadership quality ... It's one of the key things I look for in my leaders You get from others what you model for them You must be an expert in your chosen field—it ties to credibility."

Involving more MLMs as "leads" on strategic initiatives that cut across the enterprise, where they can demonstrate how their dependability and expertise converge, might help close the gap between the SLMs and MLMs top five.



Findings (By Demographic)

Does a leader’s role (either faculty or staff) influence the importance of certain leadership qualities?

For each role grouping, the following leadership qualities rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. RESPONSES TO 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BASED ON “ROLE”														
Leadership Qualities	Aggregate			By Role				\bar{X}		Standard Deviation (σ)			$\bar{X} \pm 1\sigma$	
	SLM AGG	MLM AGG	SLM AD	SLM Faculty	MLM Faculty	SLM Staff	MLM Staff	Avg of Avgs	ALL	SLM	MLM	$\bar{X} + 1\sigma$	$\bar{X} - 1\sigma$	
Leads by Example	85%	79%	75%	100%	82%	90%	60%	82%	9%	8%	7%	90%	73%	
Develops Self & Others	56%	55%	67%	40%	55%	50%	60%	52%	14%	17%	6%	66%	38%	
Effective Communicator	56%	71%	67%	40%	70%	50%	80%	63%	13%	7%	7%	75%	50%	
Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships	44%	47%	58%	20%	42%	40%	80%	43%	19%	20%	14%	63%	24%	
Competent	37%	45%	25%	60%	42%	40%	60%	44%	13%	16%	8%	57%	31%	
Credible	37%	21%	58%	0%	24%	30%	0%	24%	17%	16%	12%	41%	7%	
Displays Respect & Support for Others	33%	58%	17%	40%	61%	50%	40%	49%	18%	20%	10%	67%	30%	
Behavior Aligns with DAU Values	30%	21%	17%	60%	21%	30%	20%	26%	13%	16%	7%	39%	13%	
Critical Thinking	30%	26%	42%	20%	30%	20%	0%	27%	11%	10%	10%	38%	16%	
Exercises Authority & Decision Making	26%	26%	17%	40%	27%	30%	20%	31%	18%	21%	10%	48%	13%	
Promotes Collaboration	26%	21%	8%	40%	21%	40%	20%	24%	8%	9%	4%	33%	16%	
Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective	19%	13%	17%	40%	9%	10%	40%	17%	10%	10%	9%	27%	7%	
Change Agent	11%	8%	8%	0%	9%	20%	0%	11%	9%	10%	7%	20%	1%	
Innovator	11%	8%	25%	0%	6%	0%	20%	8%	7%	8%	5%	16%	1%	

- Associate deans: Develops Self and Others, Credible, **Critical Thinking**, and **Innovator**
- SLM faculty: Leads by Example, **Competent**, **Behavior Aligns with DAU Values**, **Promotes Collaboration**, and **Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective**
- MLM staff: Effective Communicator, **Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships**, Competent, Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective, and Innovator
- SLM staff: Leads by Example, Promotes Collaboration, and **Change Agent**

For the same grouping, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 2.

- Associate deans: Competent and Promotes Collaboration
- MLM staff: Leads by Example, Credible, Critical Thinking, and Change Agent
- SLM faculty: Effective Communicator, Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships, Credible, Change Agent, and Innovator
- SLM staff: Effective Communicator and Innovator

For Credible, the foundation of building trust, according to Stephen Covey (2009), MLM faculty who raised its importance responded:

“Can’t lead without it ... Captures a number of the other qualities that matter and would be foolish to leave it out ... implies knowledgeable and proactive ... Similar to **Competent**—means we bring experience to the situation ... When subordinates come to believe that a senior is not credible or sufficiently informed, not honest, forthright, or responsive, they’ll likely no longer be listening by the time the leader finally recognizes his/her isolation.”

For Change Agent, where leaders work to alter employee attitudes and behaviors because it’s important for long-term success and sustainability (Abbas & Asghar, 2010, p. 26), SLM staff who raised its importance responded:

“Change is the constant Need Change Agent to overcome natural resistance to change ... DAU can’t continue to do things the way they have always been done Our leadership needs to be able to recognize positive change and be willing to accomplish that change.”

Some of the greatest differences in the top five selections occurred among the associate deans, SLM faculty, and MLM staff in their selections of Competent, Credible, Promotes Collaboration, and Innovator. Of all the demographic groups, the associate deans were the only one to score Develops Self and Others one standard deviation above the mean. As the saying goes, “What you see depends on where you sit.” Associate deans might be more strategically positioned to witness the greater impacts that a more capable and “developed” workforce can make. SLM faculty were the only group to raise Behavior Aligns with DAU Values one standard deviation above the mean. This might stem from their frequent interaction with diversified and sometimes larger groups, combined with the recognition that “the greater the linkage between behavior and values, the greater an organization’s success” (Rubino, 1998). SLM faculty also generally witness firsthand the prevailing professionalism, enthusiasm, and resulting impacts of more cross-cutting enterprise projects (or the absence thereof), firsthand.

Do generational affiliations indicate any predispositions?

For the generational slice, the following leadership qualities rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 3.

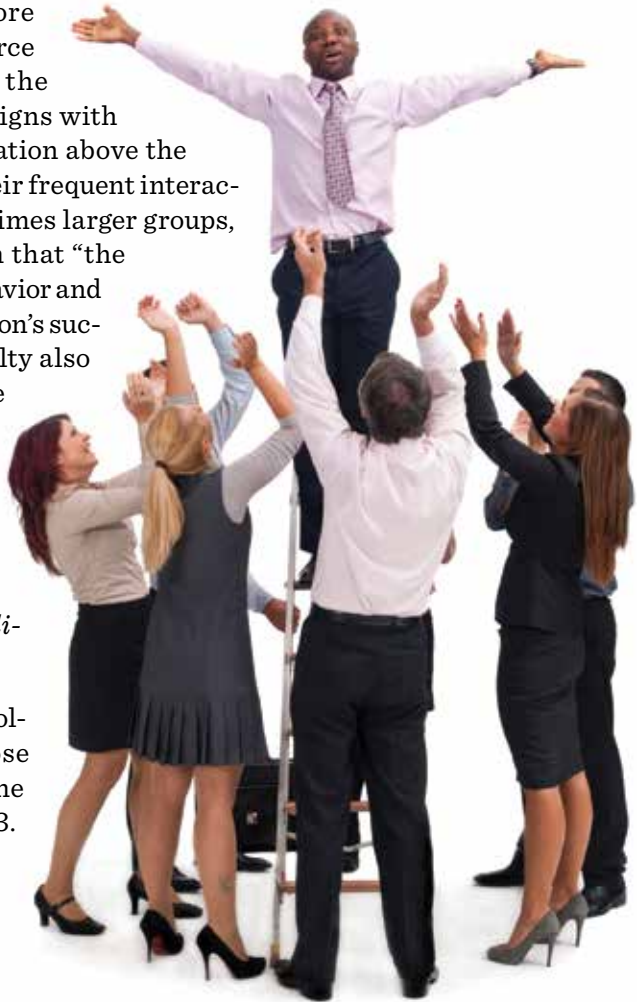


TABLE 3. RESPONSES TO 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BASED ON “GENERATION”														
Leadership Qualities	Aggregate		By Generation				X̄		Standard Deviation (σ)				X̄ ± 1σ	
	SLM AGG	MLM AGG	SLM Boomr	MLM Boomr	SLM Gen X	MLM Gen X	Avg of X		ALL	SLM	MLM		X̄ + 1σ	X̄ - 1σ
Leads by Example	85%	79%	87%	77%	75%	88%	82%	9%	8%	7%	90%	73%		
Develops Self & Others	56%	55%	61%	57%	25%	50%	52%	14%	17%	6%	66%	38%		
Effective Communicator	56%	71%	57%	67%	50%	88%	63%	13%	7%	7%	75%	50%		
Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships	44%	47%	52%	43%	0%	63%	43%	19%	20%	14%	63%	24%		
Competent	37%	45%	30%	47%	75%	38%	44%	13%	16%	8%	57%	31%		
Credible	37%	21%	39%	27%	25%	0%	24%	17%	16%	12%	41%	7%		
Displays Respect & Support for Others	33%	58%	26%	60%	75%	50%	49%	18%	20%	10%	67%	30%		
Behavior Aligns with DAU Values	30%	21%	35%	17%	0%	38%	26%	13%	16%	7%	39%	13%		
Critical Thinking	30%	26%	26%	27%	50%	25%	27%	11%	10%	10%	38%	16%		
Exercises Authority & Decision Making	26%	26%	17%	30%	75%	13%	31%	18%	21%	10%	48%	13%		
Promotes Collaboration	26%	21%	26%	20%	25%	25%	24%	8%	9%	4%	33%	16%		
Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective	19%	13%	22%	13%	0%	13%	17%	10%	10%	9%	27%	7%		
Change Agent	11%	8%	9%	10%	25%	0%	11%	9%	10%	7%	20%	1%		
Innovator	11%	8%	13%	7%	0%	13%	8%	7%	8%	5%	16%	1%		

- GEN X SLMs: Competent, Critical Thinking, **Exercises Authority and Decision Making**, and Change Agent
- GEN X MLMs: Effective Communicator and Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships

In this same category, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 3.

- Boomer SLMs: Competent
- GEN X SLMs: Develops Self and Others, Effective Communicator, Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships, Displays Respect for Others, Behavior Aligns with DAU Values, Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective, and Innovator
- GEN X MLMs: Credible, Exercises Authority and Decision Making, and Change Agent

By juxtaposing SLMs and MLMs along the lines of their generational affiliation, more dramatic variances surfaced for GEN X in particular. While the Boomers were generally consistent in the selection of their top five, GEN X SLMs' selections were more dispersed for 11 of the 14 qualities, while GEN X MLMs were less distributed in their selections. No Boomer left any of the 14 qualities out of their top five leadership qualities. GEN X SLMs and GEN X MLMs left out four and two, respectively. There can be several explanations for the GEN X fluctuations.

GEN X SLMs apparently placed significantly more stock in Competent, Critical Thinking, Exercises Authority and Decision Making, and Change Agent in what appears to be at the expense of three of the top five.

For Competent, they may have learned and want what Kolditz (2007) theorized: "Leaders need to take the time and effort to show followers what they're good at and why followers should be confident in the leader's ability" (p. 41). In their supporting comments, the respondents said:

Competent: "A leader needs to be competent for several reasons. Subordinates will have respect for a leader that has technical and leadership competence A competent leader automatically sets high standards for his/her employees because subordinates will naturally follow leadership's example A leader should be competent in their role; if not, then that is a weakness to those you wish to lead."

For Critical Thinking, they could have learned very early the value of questioning more, challenging the status quo, and reaping the benefits of creative tension and divergent thinking. They may have even learned how to “dispute their beliefs,” according to Dr. Albert Ellis, and promote more rational thinking about their own beliefs (Epstein, 2001); as well as recognize what other scholars have reported—that thinking controls feelings and volition (Elder, 1996), which can easily cloud rational and sound thinking. Two of the respondents pointed out that:

Critical Thinking: “Critical thinking skills are required for an individual to be successful at nearly all of the qualities identified It strengthens individual capabilities and encourages professionalism of others through an intellectually disciplined process by conceptualizing, applying, evaluating, and formulating a reasoning of beliefs.”

For Exercises Authority and Decision Making, the other groups gave a substantially higher number of reasons for keeping them out of the top five. Two respondents characterized it simply by saying:

Exercises Authority and Decision Making: “I feel this trait is important, but not as valuable as others listed in my opinion I considered it less important [and] because I have to trust my people to execute, I delegate.”

For Change Agent to rise in the ranking, especially in the top five, something had to occur with some of the GEN X MLMs in their past where they probably experienced the necessity for change. More often than not, many individuals generally question the need. Why the change? How will I/we be affected? Am I/we at risk as a result of the change? Harvard Professor John Kotter (1996) established an eight-step process if the case for change can be made.

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Creating the Guiding Coalition
3. Developing a Vision and Strategy
4. Communicating the Change Vision
5. Empowering Employees for Broad-based Action
6. Generating Short-term Wins

7. Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Kotter's construct is still very popular. However, GEN X MLMs might not yet fully appreciate the extent of the value proposition of change due to inexperience and/or limited exposure to certain situations, the reason for change, or perhaps merely more inconsistency among the MLMs in their top five selections. Timing could also be a factor. For example, DAU underwent a major transformation at the turn of the past century. DAU's relevancy as an institution came under scrutiny. It was about to be absorbed by another institution. DAU clearly had a "Sense of Urgency" (i.e., Kotter's Step 1) and even incorporated the word "Transformation" to promulgate it as one of DAU's five top goals. DAU had to change—and many of the Boomers and some GEN X SLMs took part in the transformation. GEN X MLMs who joined DAU later didn't, and missed the revolution. "Transformation" is no longer a DAU Strategic Goal, which could later create greater resistance to change.

The reason GEN X MLMs ranked Credible so low is only speculative. Instead of devaluing Credible, they may have made tighter connections to other leadership qualities. One of the respondents said, "Credible is similar to competent—it means we bring experience to the situation." Additionally, GEN X MLMs may not fully appreciate the trust tax (Covey, 2009)—imposed by certain leaders (and organizations) and so closely coupled with credibility—that costs organizations time and money by instituting (or inadvertently maintaining) various decision barriers (e.g., lengthy coordination cycles, bureaucratic red tape, extensive time spent in meetings, etc.).

Does supervisory experience influence the perceived importance of certain leadership qualities?

For SLMs with 15 years or more of supervisory experience, the following leadership qualities rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 4, with the following supporting comments:

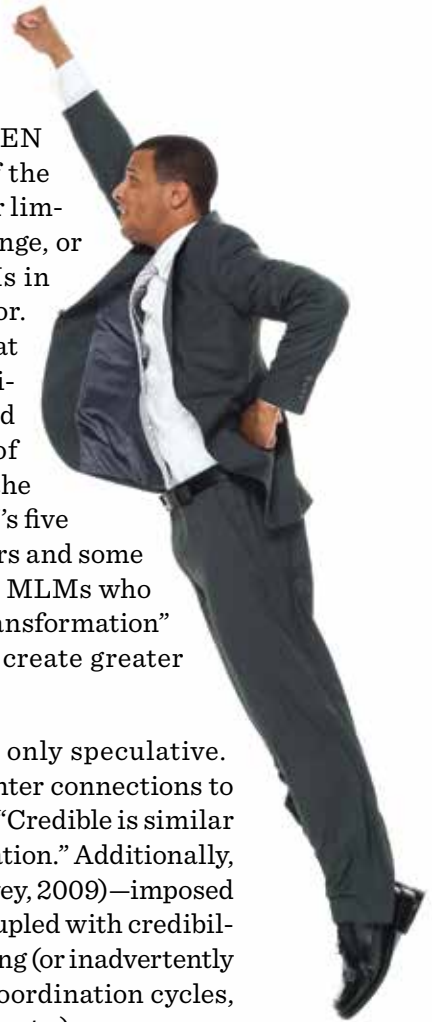


TABLE 4. RESPONSES TO 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BASED ON “SUPERVISOR EXPERIENCE”													
Leadership Qualities	Aggregate		By Supervisory Experience				\bar{X}	Standard Deviation (σ)				$\bar{X} \pm 1\sigma$	
	SLM AGG	MLM AGG	SLM 15 +	MLM 15 +	SLM < 15	MLM < 15		ALL	SLM	MLM	Avg of Avgs		
Leads by Example	85%	79%	86%	80%	83%	78%	82%	9%	8%	7%	90%	73%	
Develops Self & Others	56%	55%	67%	60%	17%	50%	52%	14%	17%	6%	66%	38%	
Effective Communicator	56%	71%	57%	65%	50%	78%	63%	13%	7%	7%	75%	50%	
Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships	44%	47%	52%	35%	17%	61%	43%	19%	20%	14%	63%	24%	
Competent	37%	45%	33%	40%	50%	50%	44%	13%	16%	8%	57%	31%	
Credible	37%	21%	43%	25%	17%	17%	24%	17%	16%	12%	41%	7%	
Displays Respect & Support for Others	33%	58%	24%	55%	67%	61%	49%	18%	20%	10%	67%	30%	
Behavior Aligns with DAU Values	30%	21%	33%	15%	17%	28%	26%	13%	16%	7%	39%	13%	
Critical Thinking	30%	26%	29%	35%	33%	17%	27%	11%	10%	10%	38%	16%	
Exercises Authority & Decision Making	26%	26%	14%	35%	67%	17%	31%	18%	21%	10%	48%	13%	
Promotes Collaboration	26%	21%	24%	20%	33%	22%	24%	8%	9%	4%	33%	16%	
Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective	19%	13%	19%	15%	17%	11%	17%	10%	10%	9%	27%	7%	
Change Agent	11%	8%	5%	10%	33%	6%	11%	9%	10%	7%	20%	1%	
Innovator	11%	8%	14%	10%	0%	6%	8%	7%	8%	5%	16%	1%	

Develops Self and Others: “[A] Leader’s job is to train him/herself out of their jobs by preparing the next wave of leaders and prepare themselves for their next job Learning is a never-ending process. Everyone can always improve, learn something new, and expand their minds, thoughts, and ideas. This will lead to better critical thinking and open up peoples’ ‘apertures’ as they view the world One of the most important functions of a leader is to facilitate development of his or her subordinates, providing mentorship and development opportunities so they can accomplish success in their own careers and positively contribute to the mission We have to stay current and relevant, and we have to do succession. That means developing our people, and also giving them [the] best chance to succeed also outside of DAU Enabling opportunities for growth in capability and improvement in themselves by supporting learning engagements and new experiences demonstrates direct interest and investment in the individual that coincides with objectives of the organization.”

Credible: “A credible leader possesses character (ethical, honest, loyal, respects others) and is recognized as competent (accountable and gets results) Credibility is the foundation for effectiveness and working with others as senior, peer, or subordinate; credibility includes competency A lack of respect and support for others severely degrades the organizational climate Most important quality. Goes with integrity. Without it, there will be no trust.”

For SLMs with less than 15 years of supervisory experience, the following leadership qualities rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$), with the following supporting comments:

Displays Respect and Support for Others: “This is a simple rule, but often forgotten. Simple respect for everyone, regardless of rank or position. It is just as important to treat the janitorial staff with respect as it is senior leadership—everyone deserves respect. The truth is we all just have different jobs. This rolls into leading by example—people watch the way you treat others and it makes a difference on how they see you as leadership material.”

Exercises Authority and Decision Making: None given.

Promotes Collaboration: “This piggy-backs on DAU Values—we are customer-focused, team-oriented, strive for excellence, and are agile and responsive to customer requirements We must promote collaboration with our faculty peers, stakeholders, acquisition workforce, etc., to ensure that we develop the most qualified acquisition workforce.”

Change Agent: None given.

For MLMs with less than 15 years of supervisory experience, the following leadership quality rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 4, with the following supporting comments:

Effective Communicator: “A leader needs to be able to communicate ideas, policy, etc., up and down the chain for his unit to be effective and feel that they are valued enough to be kept in the loop on decisions impacting them As a leader, you need to issue clear instructions for your subordinates to follow, as well as easy-to-understand interpretations of policy to enable your people to follow them We gain a lot by lessons learned by following the policies and procedures we have in place, and in order to ensure folks know that they exist or have changed, we need to have leaders and managers that communicate clearly and deliberately.”

Considering that the importance of professional development, communication, relationships, and even innovation tend to become more compelling over time, the dichotomy reinforced the importance of experience. With more experience, supervisors could be learning later that all four leadership qualities are essential to their success.

For SLMs with 15 years or more, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$), without any supporting comments:

Displays Respect and Support for Others: None given.

For SLMs with less than 15 years, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$), without any supporting comments:



Develops Self and Others, Effective Communicator, Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships, Displays Respect and Support for Others, and Innovator: None given.

Do the number of years at an organization like DAU influence the perceived importance of certain leadership qualities?

For SLMs at DAU with 3 to 10 years, the following leadership quality rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$), with the following supporting comments:

Critical Thinking: “Problem solving is vital will find the best path focused on outcomes and reality ... separates perceptions and agendas from needs and goals.”

For SLMs at DAU more than 10 years, the following leadership qualities rose one standard deviation *above* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 5, with the following supporting comments:

TABLE 5. RESPONSES TO 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BASED ON “YEARS AT DAU”													
Leadership Qualities	Aggregate		By Years at DAU				X̄		Standard Deviation (σ)			X̄ ± 1σ	
	SLM AGG	MLM AGG	SLM 3-10	SLM 3-10	MLM 3-10	SLM > 10	MLM > 10	Avg of Avgs	ALL	SLM	MLM	X̄ + 1σ	X̄ - 1σ
Leads by Example	85%	79%	77%	77%	79%	93%	78%	82%	9%	8%	7%	90%	73%
Develops Self & Others	56%	55%	46%	46%	50%	64%	67%	52%	14%	17%	6%	66%	38%
Effective Communicator	56%	71%	62%	62%	71%	50%	67%	63%	13%	7%	7%	75%	50%
Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships	44%	47%	31%	31%	42%	57%	44%	43%	19%	20%	14%	63%	24%
Competent	37%	45%	46%	46%	54%	29%	33%	44%	13%	16%	8%	57%	31%
Credible	37%	21%	31%	31%	29%	43%	0%	24%	17%	16%	12%	41%	7%
Displays Respect & Support for Others	33%	58%	46%	46%	54%	21%	78%	49%	18%	20%	10%	67%	30%
Behavior Aligns with DAU Values	30%	21%	23%	23%	25%	36%	22%	26%	13%	16%	7%	39%	13%
Critical Thinking	30%	26%	38%	38%	25%	21%	22%	27%	11%	10%	10%	38%	16%
Exercises Authority & Decision Making	26%	26%	31%	31%	21%	21%	44%	31%	18%	21%	10%	48%	13%
Promotes Collaboration	26%	21%	31%	31%	25%	21%	11%	24%	8%	9%	4%	33%	16%
Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective	19%	13%	23%	23%	13%	14%	11%	17%	10%	10%	9%	27%	7%
Change Agent	11%	8%	8%	8%	4%	14%	22%	11%	9%	10%	7%	20%	1%
Innovator	11%	8%	8%	8%	8%	14%	0%	8%	7%	8%	5%	16%	1%

Leads by Example: “Cannot expect people to follow if you are not walking [the] talk! ... People are more willing to follow someone that’s personally committed You have to show integrity, show what you expect of others, no less than what they can expect of you Every action a leader takes is closely examined by those he works with. As a leader, you broadcast your values, ethics, competence, commitment, and knowledge. These actions are infectious throughout the organization and set the standards for behavior.”

Credible: “A must if you are going to be recognized as [an] SME in a functional area within the [Defense Acquisition Management] process ... This gets to trust and respect without which a leader is inept ... If you aren’t credible, you could also be regarded as insincere, which doesn’t aid trust or the internal organizational climate, nor the confidence of external customers who count on DAU to help develop a professional acquisition workforce Most important quality. Goes with integrity. Without it, there will be no trust.”

For MLMs at DAU more than 10 years, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} + 1\sigma$) as shown in Table 5, with the following supporting comments:

Develops Self and Others: “A really good manager seeks to develop subordinates to the extent that they can be given ‘mission orders’ to execute without being given every little detail of how to do it Demonstrates selflessness, which is an important leadership quality ... If it’s important to the supervisor to develop skills and education in both themselves and employees, it shows that you care not only about the job, but about making all better at what we do You need to encourage growth in your people to fight against stagnation of thought (this includes yourself).”

Displays Respect and Support for Others: “Critical for a leader. Treat others the way you would expect to be treated Respect is a two-way street. You get what you give Without respect both ways, you have nothing. People will only do what they have to in order to get by; support and respect by the supervisor displays a trusting work environment.”

Change Agent: “Having trust in leaders instills confidence in them The leader’s credibility reflects the organization’s capabilities.”

For SLMs at DAU more than 10 years, the following leadership qualities fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$), with the following supporting comments:

Effective Communicator: “These are all great traits of a good leader. Cannot ‘justify’ why they are at the bottom.”

Competent: “I think it’s a component of credibility You don’t have to be the smartest guy or gal to lead, but you have to be smart enough to surround yourself with the smart folks and then listen to them Competent is a minimum threshold to rise to a leadership position. Other attributes become the delta between an average leader and a good leader.”

Displays Respect and Support for Others: “As a leader, it is important for you to display respect and support for others. When your followers recognize that you care and respect them, they will work harder to accomplish the mission.”

For MLMs at DAU more than 10 years, the following leadership quality fell one standard deviation *below* the mean ($\bar{x} - 1\sigma$), without any supporting comments:

Credible, Promotes Collaboration and Innovation:
None given.

Various studies have shown that 20 percent to 67 percent of the variance that measures the climate for creativity in organizations is directly attributable to leadership behavior.

Various studies have shown that 20 percent to 67 percent of the variance that measures the climate for creativity in organizations is directly attributable to leadership behavior. This suggests that leaders must act in ways that promote and support organizational innovation (Horth & Buchner, 2014). Over 80 percent of executive leaders surveyed in 2007 felt innovation was a success indicator, although less than 30 percent were satisfied with their present innovation levels (Legrand & Weiss, 2011). Coincidentally, many of the 10 traits of innovative leaders described by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman (2014) in the text that follows are embodied in the top 14 leadership qualities outlined in this study:

- Display excellent strategic vision. The most effective innovation leaders could *vividly describe their vision* of the future, and as one respondent noted about his boss: “She excelled at *painting a clear picture* of the destination, while we worked to figure out how to get there” (Effective Communication).
- Have a strong customer focus. What was merely interesting to the customer became fascinating to these individuals. They sought to get inside the customer’s mind. They *networked with clients and asked incessant questions* about their needs and wants (Critical Thinking).
- Create a climate of reciprocal trust. Innovation often requires some level of risk. Not all innovative ideas are successful. These highly innovative leaders initiated warm, *collaborative relationships* with the innovators who worked for them. They made themselves highly accessible. Colleagues knew that their leader would cover their backs and not throw them under the bus if something went wrong. People were never punished for honest mistakes (Promotes Collaboration).
- Display fearless loyalty to doing what’s right for the organization and customer. Pleasing the boss or some other higher level executive always took a back seat to doing the right thing for the project or the company (Behavior Aligns with Values).
- Put their faith in a culture that *magnifies upward communication*. These leaders believed that the best and most innovative ideas bubbled up from underneath. They strived to create a culture that uncorked good ideas from the first level of the organization.

They were often described as projecting optimism, full of energy, and always receptive to new ideas. Grimness was replaced with kidding and laughter (Effective Communication).

- Are persuasive. These individuals were highly effective in getting others to accept good ideas. They *did not push or force their ideas* onto their teams. Instead, they presented ideas with enthusiasm and conviction, and the team willingly followed (Displays Respect and Support for Others).
- Excel at setting stretch goals. These goals required people to go far beyond just working harder. These goals required that they find new ways to achieve a high goal (Critical Thinking).
- Emphasize speed. These leaders believed that speed scraped the barnacles off the hull of the boat. Experiments and rapid prototypes were preferred to lengthy studies by large committees.
- Are *candid in their communication*. These leaders were described as providing honest, and at times even blunt, feedback. Subordinates felt they could always count on straight answers from their leader (Effective Communication).
- Inspire and motivate through action. One respondent said, “For innovation to exist, you have to feel inspired.” This comes from a clear sense of purpose and meaning in the work (Builds and Nurtures Trust Relationships).

Other Leadership Qualities

At the end of the survey, the respondents were also asked what other qualities they thought were important in a DAU leader and why. Here’s a sampling of what they had to say:

Ability to manage personnel issues effectively. Problems can quickly get out of hand if not handled in a quick and fair manner. It will not only impact the person, but the perception among others that either you are not handling it well or not handling it; thus, it may affect morale amongst the other members.



Be forward thinking. In today's world where things change constantly, it is important to look ahead and try to lead your workers towards the more productive path; this is part of being competent; we want to lead folks towards what we believe is the future and not down a dead end.

A leader should be a good teacher and committed to teaching those who work for him. Humility is also an important characteristic.

Patience and persistence. Bureaucratic organizations are slow to change, so leaders in DAU need to be prepared for the long haul.

Curiosity. It is the best antidote to complacency.

Cross-region collaboration.

DAU's leaders should know their way around the inside of a classroom.

Conclusions

What does all this mean? As Table 6 shows, when it comes to leadership, demographic factors can easily influence how individuals judge certain leadership qualities through their personal experiences and exposure to various situations. The DAU respondents who participated in this particular study highlighted how they fluctuate. Is it a cause for concern? It invariably depends on a given scenario and what vital leadership qualities have either been highly effective or perhaps marginalized in their view. Historically, if leaders are undervaluing a particular set of leadership imperatives that needs more thrust, it could cost the organization they lead—profoundly. Polaroid, Eastman Kodak, Blockbuster, Eastern Airlines, Arthur Andersen, DeLorean Motors, Levitz Furniture, Enron, and many other corporations like these learned what happens when key leadership qualities lose all lift. These companies are now either resting in peace, have been cannibalized by another company, or are operating as a mere fraction of their original size. Their leaders underestimated, ignored, and/or prematurely dismissed how their culture, product lines, processes, corporate structure, competition, customer base, outside forces, politics, etc., combined in some way to create a consequential nexus with negative returns. Their leaders had to make hard choices, or tried to make them and subsequently succumbed to insurmountable organizational resistance.

When it comes to leadership, demographic factors can easily influence how individuals judge certain leadership qualities through their personal experiences and exposure to various situations.

On the other hand, what leadership qualities did they discount too quickly that would have resulted in more favorable outcomes? According to research, leadership shortcomings generally center on the failure to recognize (or believe in) the warning signs and respond in kind with a confluence of these same 14 leadership qualities.

In this study, the respondents had to reflect on their experiences and decide what still predominates today. The leadership qualities that rose to their top five were generally very consistent in the aggregate until the slicing began. The most significant fluctuations occurred among four of the top five. Leading by Example saw much less variation. The respondents did not undervalue any particular leadership quality. Instead, they seemed to make connections among several below their top five to reclaim their relative importance.

It's difficult to attribute any one factor that promotes the predominance or lessens some of the leadership qualities that typically find their way over others in the top five. This author was particularly surprised to see where Innovator fell, however. Lately, the Defense Acquisition Executive and his senior leaders have reinforced both its importance and connection to persistence (Kendall, 2015). Inarguably, DAU is not a technology company and is not necessarily subject to the same consequences of disruptive technology that affect technology companies. However, since Innovator fell so markedly outside the respondents' top five, will it eventually result in a negative "performance trajectory" and hasten DAU's decline as it did for other companies with the same fatal flight path (Christensen, 2015, pp. 9-21)? Even though DAU is fulfilling congressional direction (in accordance with the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, 1991) to train DoD's acquisition workforce, many companies are hot on its heels, vying to deliver the same training and other services that DAU provides. Because DAU aligns its workforce with annually updated Strategic Goals and measurable performance targets, this "development-of-the-fittest" approach knowingly positions SLMs and MLMs to recognize better, during their development, the early warning signs that leaders sometimes miss—and sometimes miss too late (McCall, 1998, p. 17). At DAU, the fluctuations among the 14 leadership qualities is no cause for concern in this author's opinion. This is so as long as SLMs and MLMs who eventually take the helm learn that both the emphasis and relative importance of the 14 leadership qualities *will* change, depending on the nexus of all the factors and conditions that could produce real organizational peril if they do not. And, that's what matters the most.

TABLE 6. RESPONSES TO 14 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BASED ON “AGGREGATE”

DAU Leadership Qualities	Aggregate		By Role					By Generation				By Supervisory Exp				By Years at DAU				\bar{x}	Standard Deviations (σ)			Average $\bar{x} \pm 1\sigma$	
	SLM AGG	MLM AGG	SLM AD	SLM Faculty	MLM Faculty	SLM Staff	MLM Staff	SLM Boomr	MLM Boomr	SLM Gen X	MLM Gen X	SLM 15 +	MLM 15 +	SLM < 15	MLM < 15	SLM 3-10	MLM 3-10	SLM > 10	MLM > 10	AVG of avgs	ALL	SLM	MLM	$\bar{x} + 1\sigma$	$\bar{x} - 1\sigma$
Leads by Example	85%	79%	75%	100%	82%	90%	60%	87%	77%	75%	88%	86%	80%	83%	78%	77%	79%	93%	78%	82%	9%	8%	7%	90%	73%
Develops Self & Others	56%	55%	67%	40%	55%	50%	60%	61%	57%	25%	50%	67%	60%	17%	50%	46%	50%	64%	67%	52%	14%	17%	6%	66%	38%
Effective Communicator	56%	71%	67%	40%	70%	50%	80%	57%	67%	50%	88%	57%	65%	50%	78%	62%	71%	50%	67%	63%	13%	7%	7%	75%	50%
Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships	44%	47%	58%	20%	42%	40%	80%	52%	43%	0%	63%	52%	35%	17%	61%	31%	42%	57%	44%	43%	19%	20%	14%	63%	24%
Competent	37%	45%	25%	60%	42%	40%	60%	30%	47%	75%	38%	33%	40%	50%	50%	46%	54%	29%	33%	44%	13%	16%	8%	57%	31%
Credible	37%	21%	58%	0%	24%	30%	0%	39%	27%	25%	0%	43%	25%	17%	17%	31%	29%	43%	0%	24%	17%	16%	12%	41%	7%
Displays Respect & Support for Others	33%	58%	17%	40%	61%	50%	40%	26%	60%	75%	50%	24%	55%	67%	61%	46%	54%	21%	78%	48%	18%	20%	10%	67%	30%
Behavior Aligns with DAU Values	30%	21%	17%	60%	21%	30%	20%	35%	17%	0%	38%	33%	15%	17%	28%	23%	25%	36%	22%	26%	13%	16%	7%	39%	13%
Critical Thinking	30%	26%	42%	20%	30%	20%	0%	26%	27%	50%	25%	29%	35%	33%	17%	38%	25%	21%	22%	27%	11%	10%	10%	38%	16%
Exercises Authority & Decision Making	26%	26%	17%	40%	27%	30%	20%	17%	30%	75%	13%	14%	35%	67%	17%	31%	21%	21%	44%	31%	18%	21%	10%	48%	13%
Promotes Collaboration	26%	21%	8%	40%	21%	40%	20%	26%	20%	25%	25%	24%	20%	33%	22%	31%	25%	21%	11%	24%	8%	9%	4%	33%	16%
Maintains DAU Enterprise Perspective	19%	13%	17%	40%	9%	10%	40%	22%	13%	0%	13%	19%	15%	17%	11%	23%	13%	14%	11%	17%	10%	10%	9%	27%	7%
Change Agent	11%	8%	8%	0%	9%	20%	0%	9%	10%	25%	0%	5%	10%	33%	6%	8%	4%	14%	22%	11%	9%	10%	7%	20%	1%
Innovator	11%	8%	25%	0%	6%	0%	20%	13%	7%	0%	13%	14%	10%	0%	6%	8%	8%	14%	0%	8%	7%	8%	5%	16%	1%

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Biography



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